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ABSTRACT

This paper cites as selected taboos in teaching reading (identified by educators very frequently) the following: (1) homogeneous grouping; (2) round robin reading; (3) use of textbooks and workbooks in the curriculum; (4) individual endeavors in school work; (5) memorization of content; and (6) the controlled vocabulary in reading. The paper discusses each of these concepts in sequence and analyzes related implications. It concludes that reading teachers need to be on the lookout always for improved procedures in teaching, technology included, and that these new approaches should not be based on ideology but rather on assisting each student to read more proficiently. (NKA)

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Identified Sins in Teaching Reading

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IDENTIFIED SINS IN TEACHING READING

There are selected taboos in teaching that educators identify very frequently. These sins appear to be a fragrant violation of all that is "good" in education. These include homogeneous grouping, round robin reading, use of textbooks and workbooks in the curriculum, individual endeavors in school work, memorization of content, and the controlled vocabulary in reading. I will discuss each of these concepts in sequence and analyze related implications.

Homogeneous Grouping

Most writers and speakers in education consider homogeneous grouping of pupils a "sin." With homogeneous grouping, pupils in a class or committee are somewhat uniform in achievement. The term homogeneous grouping may be compared with heterogeneous grouping whereby pupils are of mixed achievement levels. The latter is considered to be more democratic and natural since in society, individuals interact regardless of ability and achievement levels. There really would be no basis for making that judgment. Why? Sometimes "birds of a feather" do interact much with each other in society. Then too, there are times when heterogeneous arrangements occur in the societal arena.Why then must there be only heterogeneous grouping of pupils in school? These advocates indicate that research says that pupils do better in mixed levels of achievement when grouped for instruction. The trouble with research is that nothing is conclusive. Research results provide opportunities for argument and debate pertaining to many points of view in the study. I believe that learning may be hindered for selected pupils when heterogeneous grouping is always emphasized. Certainly, the gifted and talented, for example, should also have opportunities to be challenged by their own peers.The gifted and talented should not be expected to assist the slower learners to "catch up." This catching up will never occur and if it does, the gifted/talented will have been held back. Certainly, each pupil should achieve as optimally as possible in all curriculum areas.

Approximately, twenty-five years ago, homogeneous grouping was advocated by selected educators so that "looking down" upon the slower learners would not occur, as would be true of heterogeneously grouped pupils. "Looking down" upon others is a negative trait of human behavior. All pupils should be respected and accepted no matter where they are in achievement. A better chance of assisting each pupil to

achieve as optimally as possible might then be in evidence. Ridiculing and belittling others are very bad habit formations of the giver of these oral commands. Reynolds and Plucker (1999) wrote:

To illustrate what might happen when conducting internet research, consider the following example; Imagine that two principals have been asked by their school boards to gather information about ability grouping... Principal A uses a search engine and obtains a list of 15 sites that contain information on grouping. The principal reads the first three sites, notices that all contain similarly condemning remarks about grouping, and quickly concludes that grouping should be banned from the school.

Principal B tries a different approach, initially using a search engine to obtain a list not different from Principal A. But then Principal B looks through each of the sites, discarding those that are published anonymously, are outdated, or are clearly inappropriate... Principal B concludes that:

* Two well developed ideological camps exist, with one supporting ability grouping and the other in favor of mixed ability classes.

* Ability grouping, gifted education, inclusion, and cooperative learning are completely different issues, although many people discuss them as though they are interchangeable.

* Research on grouping is equivocal, with conclusions dependent upon the purpose of the grouping, the type of outcome assessed (e. g. social skills, student achievement, resource distribution).

Round Robin Reading

Round robin reading emphasizes placing pupils within small groups of five or six pupils, approximately, taking their individual sequential turns in reading a lesson orally to the teacher and learners in the group. Generally, a purpose is stated for reading prior to these pupils reading orally, such as finding answers to a question. There certainly is much criticism of using this approach, as given by reading teachers and professors of reading. I see nothing wrong with using this activity along with other methods of instruction. The teacher has a chance here to develop within pupils an attitude of respecting all pupils, regardless of the individual's level of reading achievement. If a pupil snickers at the reading achievement of a pupil, then an opportunity is present to have pupils become caring and respecting individuals. The teacher should state clearly and implement plans in classroom teaching so that the rude behavior does not occur. Continuous evaluation needs to be in the offing to notice if pupil behavior is more positive and accepting of others.

Round robin reading may present the following opportunities:

1. varying the kinds of activities provided for pupils.
2. noticing the kinds of errors pupils make in reading and working in the direction of remedying the problems areas.
3. listening to the quality of oral reading and offering sincere suggestions for improvement.
4. reward pupils orally for reading improvement so that all may receive incentives to improve.
5. providing personal attention to a small group of readers in round robin reading (See Ediger, 1998, Chapter Seven).

Use of Basal Texts and Workbooks

Basal readers and workbooks have come under considerable criticism in educational journals and talks provided at teacher education conventions. The emphasis then is upon literature sets, not basal readers, for teaching pupils. One writer in a journal article stated that, "he did not use basals and therefore did a good job of teaching." That statement did not make sense. Much depends upon how basals are used. Each basal has a manual to provide suggestions for objectives, learning opportunities, and appraisal procedures. These are suggestions, not commands, in using the basal. I maintain that the following goals may be achieved as well by using basals as compared other procedures in reading instruction:

1. critical and creative thinking as well as problem solving. The subject matter in a basal allows room to have pupils achieve these goals. The teacher needs to take the lead for pupils to achieve these ends with learners also being actively involved in engaging in higher levels of cognition.
2. the basal may be varied with other methods of instruction, such as literature sets, individualized reading with related library book content, peer reading and depth study of the topic being considered by using additional reference sources including internet, world wide web, networking, and multi-media technology. Use of basals does not rule out, by any means, the use of the latest technology and children's literature to increase reading achievement of individual learners.
3. content in basals may be integrated with units studied in science, social studies, and mathematics. Generally, there are stories in basal that relate to these different curriculum areas. Children's literature provides chances for additional integration of content.
4. metacognition may be stressed by guiding pupils to reflect upon what has been read. Learners might then monitor their very own achievement in terns of what is known and what is left to acquire.
5. whole language and phonic skills may be stressed in using basals. What is taught here must reflect upon the needs of individual children (See Ediger, 1997, Chapter Three).

The teacher needs to use basal in a manner whereby each pupil may have personal needs met in becoming a better reader. What about the use of workbooks in helping pupils to increase reading skills? The teacher should select what might benefit pupils in reading when workbook inclusion is being emphasized. There are learning opportunities in workbooks that may definitely assist pupils in comprehension and word recognition techniques. The workbook is a neutral device and it is up to the teacher to select as learning opportunities that which assists pupils to become better readers, and not use the workbook pages as activities in learning for the sake of doing so. Any material of instruction can be used as busy work, including sustained silent reading. The teacher needs to look at the goals of instruction and then fit in the workbook to guide pupils to achieve these ends. If a workbook cannot fit in, then it should not be used. I find that workbooks do have a niche in teaching and learning. The experiences therein need to be evaluated in terms of meeting individual needs and as an approach to vary the kinds of activities provided children.

Collaborative Versus Individual Endeavors in Learning

There are numerous educators who exalt the virtues of collaborative learning. It almost sounds as if this should be emphasized all day in teaching and learning. Inherent is the idea that pupils teach each other better than what the teacher can do. I believe there should be ample opportunities for pupils to work individually. This is an intelligence (See Howard Gardner, 1993 and his emphasis among pupils having multiple intelligences). Dr. Gardner separates interpersonal intelligences from intrapersonal intelligence. The former emphasizes group work as one intelligence whereby the individual is truly able to achieve at a very high rate in group endeavors. In comparison, intrapersonal intelligences stresses individual endeavors in which a pupil accomplishes much by the self. Learning styles psychology also differentiates ways in which pupils learn, such as individual versus group work (See Dunn and Dunn, 1979).

The following are suggestions for teaching pertaining to collaborative versus individual activities and projects for learners:

1. a balance between the two approaches should be in the offing since people in society engage in both working/visiting with others as well as doing things by the self. A person would be lost in society who can only do one or the other-- collaborative or individual work.
2. learners may suggest to the teacher and have an option in numerous situations if they wish to work with others or alone in an ongoing lesson.
3. the teacher might also assign learners to committees or to

individualized work depending upon what the teacher deems to meet a pupil's needs.

4. sometimes, a task lends itself better to cooperative endeavors, such as a creative dramatics activity. At other times, a learner works on his/her own portfolio by the self.

5. there needs to be a balance between teacher versus pupil choice in choosing learning activities to attain objectives in the curriculum. These may emphasize interpersonal or intrapersonal intelligence.

Memorization of Content

Of all sins in teaching, memorization is a bad word, mentioned by writers and speakers at teacher education conventions. Thus, the recommendations are that pupils do zero memorization of subject matter. All skills then should emphasize higher levels of cognition such as understanding the facts, using the facts, analyzing the facts, generalizing the facts, and assessing how valuable each fact is. I agree 100% that each pupil needs to go on to higher levies of cognition and not stop with memorizations of subject matter. When attending grade school and high school, 1934-1942, there was a considerable amount of materials to be learned that were memorized. There were poems such as "Old Ironsides," which all pupils were to memorize and recite orally in class. I recall many of these poems today that I memorized and still enjoy their recitation. It truly is good to have a quality memory that can recall factual content. I find there are selected things I memorized that might have no practical value, such as the first three permanent English settlements in the New World. Memorization can be done for its own sake, not always for utilitarian values. Knowledge acquired may have intrinsic worth and not application values. It also is difficult to determine when acquired facts may be useful to the pupil. What appears to be utilitarian at one time may not have its worth in terms of solving lifelike problems. Aristotle (388-322 BC) believed in obtaining information for its own sake. John Dewey (1859-1952) advocated knowledge be valued for its application values within the framework of problem solving. Aristotle in ancient Athens and John Dewey represented diametrically opposite points of view on knowledge acquisition. I tend to agree with John Dewey and his experimentalist point of view of problem solving, but I believe too that we should leave room for Aristotelian thought in knowledge acquisition (Ediger, 1995, Chapter One).

What might be done to encourage pupils who desire to memorize subject matter? The following are given as suggestions for pupil memorization:

1. poems that pupils wish to memorize for and without extra allotted credit.

2. names, dates, and places taught that are personally rewarding and provide the structure of knowledge for learners in terms of units of study taught.

3. content that is personally enriching and help develop appreciations.

4. essentials in reading such as sound/symbol relationships within the context of pupils learning to read. These activities include memorizing a reasonable core of basic sight words in learning to read.

5. those needed subject matter learnings, such as basic addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division facts that have not been retained by a pupil, even though they have been presented meaningfully.

The Controlled Vocabulary

The controlled vocabulary was quite popular in teaching reading in the school setting during the 1970s and earlier. With the controlled vocabulary, beginning readers met up with a considerable amount of repetition in developing a basic sight vocabulary. Sentences that might be read included patterns such as the following:

1. run, Bill, run, run. The emphasis was upon pupils mastering the word "run" as a sight word. Here, a learner would meet up with "run" several times so that mastery may be possible.

2. swim, Sara, swim, swim.

The controlled vocabulary in reading has been replaced with the Big Book approach, Reading Recovery, repetitive reading, and echoic reading, among others.

Sight vocabularies are quite valuable in having a set of words that pupils have mastered in identification. These words are relevant and useful. Pupils might then build on these known words to recognize new words. Dolch's "220 Basic Sight Words" (See Dolch, 1955, 373-374) were considered a classic and still are practical to assist pupils to develop a recognizable set of words, known immediately by sight. Pupils may build on these words in learning to read more complex ideas.

The controlled vocabulary in reading has been criticized for not being written in natural sentences the way pupils speak. No one speaks the way sentences are written with a controlled vocabulary. That may be true for most adults, but young children do like to practice saying and identifying the same words. A two or three year old child may like to repeat words again and again such as the following-- light, car, pine cone, truck, and dog. Generally, the youngsters like to point to the picture or object as the words are being said. By saying thee words and pointing to the referents, children are practicing talking and reinforcing knowledge possessed. Then too, confidence is being

developed as these repetitive acts occur. Young children here realize they can and do achieve as well as grow in word pronunciation and recognition. On cereal boxes and other food items, pupils begin to identify abstract words in the preschool years. These words will need to be met up with again in print so that young children become proficient in word recognition. For readers with the controlled vocabulary, I recommend the following"

1. using the content for pupils who need these approaches in learning to read.
2. pupils practicing reading using these approaches, as necessary, in assisting pupils to become confident and increasingly proficient in reading.

New approaches in teaching reading come and some go. It would be good if all teachers would provide experiences for pupils that assist the learner to becoming a better reader. Innovative approaches are constantly being developed that guide pupils to achieve at a higher rate of achievement. Others are fads which have come and gone.

Conclusion

Reading teachers need to have a better approach to appraise new procedures advocated in reading instruction. The pros and cons of each need to be evaluated. What is good for the learner in attaining more optimally in reading should be more enduring as approaches to use in helping pupils learn to read. Frills and fads come and go in the teaching of reading. The Initial Teaching Alphabet, as one procedure came to the United States in the 1960s and was gone by the end of the 1970s. The transition to be made by beginning readers from the Initial Teaching Alphabet to traditional symbols, grapheme/phoneme relationships, was too complex.

Reading teachers continually need to be on the lookout for improved procedures in having pupils learn to read, technology included. These new approaches should not be based on ideology, but rather on assisting each pupil to read more proficiently. Change is always a key concept in reading methodology and in guiding more optimal learner achievement (Ediger, 1995, 1-11).

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